

Testimony of John M. R. Kneuer
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before the
Committee on Homeland Security's
Subcommittee on Emergency Preparedness, Science and Technology
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Thank you, Chairman Reichert, and Members of the Subcommittee, for inviting me here today to testify about the role of the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) regarding the state of interoperable communications. My name is John Kneuer, and I serve as the Acting Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Communications and Information and Acting Administrator of NTIA.

Among its responsibilities, NTIA is the principal telecommunications policy advisor to the Secretary of Commerce and the President, and the manager of federal government's use of the radio spectrum. Throughout the Bush Administration, this intersection of telecommunications policy and spectrum management has been the key focus of NTIA, including public safety communications and interoperability issues.

I would like to share with you a number of public safety initiatives NTIA is undertaking that are focused on interoperability.

I. President's Spectrum Policy Initiative

Spectrum enables communications for military operations and first responders in support of recovery efforts for natural disasters and terrorist attacks. At the same time, spectrum for communications contributes to innovation, job creation, and economic growth. Wireless technologies and services that depend on spectrum provide critical support to federal agency missions that serve the American people and support a wide array of commercial and non-federal government applications that provide economic benefits and protect lives and property. To further develop and implement a U.S. spectrum policy for the 21st century that meets the Nation's needs and spurs economic growth, President George W. Bush established the Spectrum Policy Initiative (the Initiative) in June 2003.

The President established specific goals for the Initiative, two of which are particularly relevant to this hearing. The objectives of this interagency Initiative are to:

- (a) foster economic growth;
- (b) **ensure our national and homeland security;**
- (c) maintain U.S. global leadership in communications technology development and services; and

(d) satisfy vital U.S. needs in areas, such as public safety, scientific research, Federal transportation infrastructure, and law enforcement.

In June 2004, the Department submitted to the President two reports containing the recommendations developed during this one-year analysis of spectrum policy issues. Report 1 contained recommendations of the Federal Government Spectrum Policy Task Force. Report 2 presented the recommendations from State and local governments, and from private sector responders, as expressed during a series of meetings and through written comments submitted to NTIA. In November 2004, the President issued his second Executive Memorandum on spectrum reform and directed the Department of Commerce to implement those recommendations in the reports that were not expressly directed to other agencies and offices. In the Executive Memorandum, the President directed the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), in consultation with the Department of Commerce and other agencies, to identify public safety spectrum requirements, and to develop a comprehensive Spectrum Needs Plan to address spectrum issues related to the public safety community, as well as the continuity of government operations. DHS and NTIA have determined that to respond to this directive, DHS will have several responsibilities for identifying and addressing the spectrum requirements of the public safety community, and will develop a comprehensive plan to address public safety spectrum needs, interference, technology, and security issues. NTIA has been working closely with DHS to carry out these responsibilities.

One of the recommendations of the President's Spectrum Reform Initiative is to develop a Federal/non-Federal public safety demonstration program. To implement this recommendation, NTIA, with the assistance of the Federal agencies and the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), examined the operational and cost effectiveness of sharing spectrum and critical communications infrastructure among commercial, Federal, State and local public safety entities. NTIA coordinated with federal agencies, including DHS, to consider existing demonstration programs for use in the pilot program. NTIA evaluated several programs in accordance with selection criteria that include factors such as whether the program demonstrates cost-effectiveness of sharing, whether the program is in existence and funded, and whether the program operates within existing allocations. I am pleased to announce the selection of the Washington DC Wireless Accelerated Responder Network (WARN) as the first demonstration program. The WARN project allows an interoperable, city-wide, broadband public safety network that provides real time video tools for city wide remote surveillance, chemical and biological detection and several other emergency related services. The results from this demonstration will be important in the development of a strategic plan for ensuring public safety during emergencies.

II. Standard Setting

Additionally, NTIA has been actively involved in the standards-setting process for public safety communications. We have partnered with agencies and programs such as the National Institute of Standards and Technology's Office of Law Enforcement Standards, DHS's SAFECOM Program, Department of Justice's Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, the Federal Partnership for Interoperable Communications, and DHS Chief Information Officer's Wireless Management Office. NTIA is working daily with prominent members of the public

safety community, including representatives of the International Association of Chiefs of Police, International Association of Fire Chiefs, the Association of Public Safety Communication Officials, International Inc., the National Association of State Emergency Medical Services Directors, and the National Public Safety Telecommunications Council. Work is centered on developing a long-term standardized approach for nationwide communications interoperability and information sharing among local, State, and Federal public safety agencies, and short-term interim solutions to facilitate communications while the long-term approach is being completed.

NTIA's long-term approach is based on an accelerated, yet structured, process that includes the public safety community to produce a comprehensive qualitative and quantitative statement of requirements for public safety communications, an architecture framework that describes the current and required future states of interoperability, and the interface standards that define the elements and performance of the interoperability architecture. Short-term, interim solution work is focused on testing and evaluating products and services offered currently to the community to determine if they can enable higher degrees of immediate interoperability effectively and economically. All segments of the NTIA program begin and end with practitioner input and acceptance. NTIA and its federal partners continue to work alongside practitioners to complete the remaining interface standards for Project 25, the digital narrowband solution that federal departments such as Homeland Security, Justice and Defense, and many State and local entities have adopted.

III. Responsibilities under the Deficit Reduction Act

On February 8, the President signed the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005, which contains a provision to establish a \$1 billion public safety interoperability grant program within the Department of Commerce, to be funded through spectrum auction receipts. Under Section 3006 of the Act, NTIA in consultation with the DHS, was given the responsibility to assist state and local public safety agencies to acquire, to deploy, and to train for the use of interoperable communications systems that can utilize portions of the 700 MHz band or enable interoperability with communications systems that can utilize this spectrum.

NTIA has begun the process of implementing this grant program. NTIA has met with the Department of Treasury to develop a borrowing agreement to facilitate initial program activity prior to the availability of receipts from the auction. In consultation with DHS through its Office of Grants and Training and the SAFECOM Program, NTIA is exploring the most efficient and effective ways to implement this program using where appropriate the existing DHS grants infrastructure and expertise. NTIA is also in discussions with the SAFECOM Program regarding its existing federal grants guidance on public safety interoperability. Together we will use background research from public safety stakeholders and the SAFECOM public safety communications interoperability "Statement of Requirements" to explore the use of all available technologies that can be used by first responders to advance overall interoperability. NTIA in consultation with DHS intends to design this one-time grant opportunity to achieve a meaningful improvement in the state of public safety communications interoperability and provide the maximum amount of interoperable communication systems with a minimum of impact to or replacement of existing Federal, State, tribal, and local radiocommunication assets.

Since the Act became law, NTIA has met with various stakeholders interested in the public safety interoperability program. Additionally, we have met and will be meeting in the next few weeks with the representatives of the public safety community to seek their views on this grant program. Given the significant amount of Federal funding devoted to interoperability over the last three years, we are committed to ensuring that these funds are targeted towards delivering tangible improvements in regional inter-agency communications.

During these days of heightened security and awareness, public safety agencies are required and expected to serve its citizens as effectively as possible. The Administration is committed to improving the state of communications interoperability within the United States and NTIA is working vigorously on various interoperability issues to assist public safety agencies in meeting these expectations.

Mr. Chairman, once again, I would like to thank you for inviting me here today to speak to you and the Subcommittee. This concludes my remarks and I would be happy to answer any question you or Subcommittee members may have.